

Civil War Book Review

Winter 2005

Article 45

The President Is Shot!: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

Meg Galante-DeAngelis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Galante-DeAngelis, Meg (2005) "The President Is Shot!: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol7/iss1/45>

Review

Galante-DeAngelis, Meg

Winter 2005

Holzer, Harold *The President Is Shot!: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*.
Boyds Mill Press, \$17.95 ISBN 1563979853

Murder mystery

Non-fiction fit for young readers

There are thousands of books written each year for young readers. Many of these works are of historical fiction. But every teacher of young readers knows that works of well-written, well-researched historical non-fiction are much harder to find, and this leaves teachers of young readers to use much historical fiction in their presentation of history. Obvious problems arise when much of the history to which young readers are exposed is really historical fiction.

Harold Holzer's **The President Is Shot! The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln** is an answer to that dilemma. Written in a readable, engaging prose and illustrated with a variety of interesting and thought-provoking photographs and drawings, **The President Is Shot!** combines solid research and a strong, cohesive story. The characters that Holzer has to work with, Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, the Washington elite, and John Wilkes Booth and his fellow conspirators, are as complex and human as any that could be imagined and drawn in non-fiction. Holzer weaves the events leading to and following the assassination into an exciting whodunit. Using short focused chapters, the book encourages classroom use and concentration on different aspects of the story. This organizational feature will allow teachers to encourage students to do independent investigation and research to learn more about certain aspects of the story that interest them.

Holzer begins the book with a concise and complete introduction to the Lincoln presidency and the American Civil War. He keeps the text simple and direct but never sacrifices the details of the story that young readers will find fascinating. Holzer helps the reader understand the situational complexities of

the assassination plot and its conspirators. He concludes with the national response to the assassination, and the trial and execution of the conspirators.

The choice and use of illustrations is another outstanding feature of the book. Many of these illustrations have never been seen by young readers and help to keep the reader's attention and focus by supporting the text so beautifully. A particularly nice feature is a Postscript that tells what happened to many of the most important characters and places in the story after the assassination, trial and execution of the conspirators. This feature could easily encourage interested readers to continue their reading and research into the Reconstruction Era.

Perhaps Harold Holzer is the perfect person to write a young readers book about the Lincoln Assassination. His scholarship in this area defines him as one of our leading Lincoln experts. Bringing that expertise to the venue of young readers books, Holzer tells the stories that he knows so well and therefore opens up the world of the Lincoln Assassination with an intimacy that many writers could not achieve. It is ultimately reassuring that someone with Holzer's credentials as a Lincoln scholar also believes that young readers are smart and sophisticated enough to read real history rather than a contrived fictional version. This is not Holzer's first Lincoln book for this reading audience, and hopefully it is not his last. Perhaps his work will encourage other respected Civil War scholars to share their expertise with young readers. This attention to the young reader could help ignite an interest in history in the next generation and clear the way for this next generation's Civil War historians.

Meg Galante-DeAngelis teaches at the University of Connecticut. As a social historian, her search for a glimpse at our ancestors as people has led her to study the lives of the soldiers of the Civil War and their families.